

The present record is the first from the Eastern Ghats and adds northern Andhra to its known range.

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## 12. NOTES ON SOME INTERESTING BIRDS FROM THE SALT LAKES, NEAR CALCUTTA

(With two plates)

The North and South Salt Lakes together constitute a sizable expanse (c. 92 sq. km.) of low-lying swampland, skirting the eastern fringes of the city of Calcutta. In the recent past, they were connected with the lower reaches of the Hooghly River basin, were under tidal influence, and contained brackish water; hence the name 'Salt Lakes'. With the severance of the connexion with the Hooghly following silting of the connecting channels, they have become landlocked, freshwater swamps. They are extensively used as fisheries, consisting of a large number of fish-rearing tanks (locally known as 'bheri') of various sizes, separated from each other by narrow dikes ranging in height from a few centimetres to about 60 cm. above the level of water which is seldom more than 1.5 metres deep. The bottom is soft, oozy mud, made chiefly of decaying organic matter of animal and vegetable origin. The most conspicuous among the various aquatic plants growing in the 'bheries' are the Nal reed (*Phragmites karka*), Hogla bulrush (*Typha angustata*) and the Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), while various grasses and other herbs and shrubs grow on the dikes (Pl. 1 & Pl. 2, Fig. 1). Small hamlets (locally called 'ala') where the fishery workers live, are dotted here and there, and several species of planted trees of economic importance are grown there.

During a systematic survey of the bird and mammal fauna of the Salt Lakes and bird-ringing commencing from 1961, we have come across some birds which should not be there according to books. Likewise, interesting aspects of behaviour of certain birds have also been noticed there by us. As the detailed report of our observation may take some time to complete, we are taking this opportunity of recording those that may be of interest to the students of bird biology.

**Jynx torquilla chinensis** Hesse. Chinese Wryneck.

A regular winter visitor in small numbers to the Calcutta area, the Chinese Wryneck prefers the reeds and shrubs in the Salt Lakes, although elsewhere it is generally found on trees and shrubs. We have taken several specimens from reed-beds.

**Hirundo rustica tytleri** Jerdon. Tytler's Swallow.

Although the standard books on the subject restrict the western limit of the Tytler's Swallow to Dacca and Mymensingh in East Pakistan (Baker 1926, p. 242; Vaurie 1959, p. 10; Ripley 1961, p. 273), we find it as a regular winter visitor in the Salt Lakes. It occurs there along with *H. r. rustica* and *H. r. gutturalis* in mixed flocks. However, its number is not as great as that of the other two subspecies. Unlike its cousins, it comes to the area as late as October and leaves in April.

**Acrocephalus bistrigiceps** Swinhoe. Blackbrowed Reed Warbler.

Like the Tytler's Swallow, the Blackbrowed Reed Warbler also regularly visits the Salt Lakes in small numbers during the winter, notwithstanding its western limits of distribution in Assam and Manipur according to books (Baker 1924, p. 392; Vaurie 1959, p. 239; Ripley 1961, p. 466) It occurs in thick reed-beds, generally associating with the Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*), Blyth's Reed Warbler (*A. dumetorum*) and the Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella certhiola*).

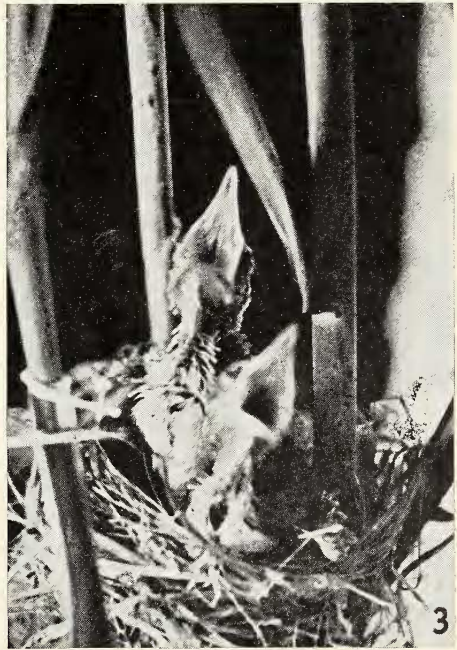
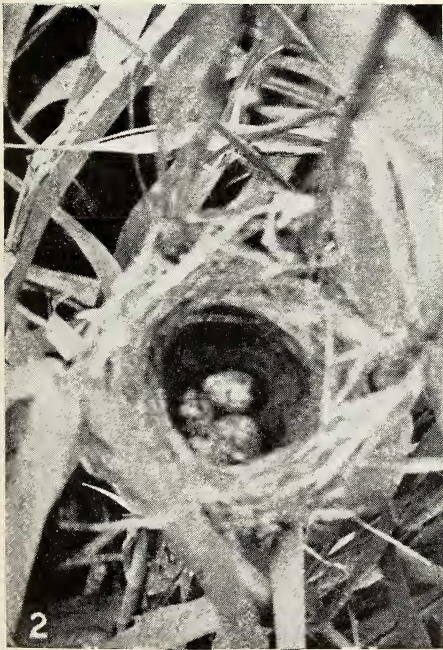
**Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens** (Jerdon). Indian Great Reed Warbler.

This bird has been referred to as only a winter visitor in Bengal (Baker 1924, p. 389; Vaurie 1959, p. 245; Ripley 1961, p. 465). However, we find it as resident in the Salt Lakes. In winter, the local resident population is greatly augmented by the influx of migrant populations.

The resident population regularly breeds in thick reeds during the monsoon. Occupied nests were observed as early as 31 May and as late as 13 September.

Nests are constructed generally in small colonies, and patches of reeds in the middle of 'bheries' (that is, surrounded on all sides by an expanse of water) are preferred as nesting sites to the peripheral reed-beds.

The nest is firmly attached to 4-7 (sometimes more) reed-stems standing in 1-1.5 m. deep water, its bottom being about 30-90 cm. above the surface of water. It is a neat, compact, deep cup, made up of coarse-cut leaves of the Hogla bulrush (*Typha angustata*), intermixed



Figs. 1. Principal vegetation of the Salt Lakes; 2. Nest with a clutch of four eggs of the Indian Great Reed Warbler, North Salt Lake, 5 Aug. 1962; 3. Nestlings of the Indian Great Reed Warbler, North Salt Lake, 13 Sep. 1964.